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SIPDIS

DEPT for AF/C Madeeha Ashraf; AF/EX/PMO Lloyd Champ  
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [AMGT](#) [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [CF](#) [KFLU](#)

SUBJECT: Congo/Brazzaville: Avian and Pandemic  
Influenza Preparedness

REFS: (A) STATE 209622; (B) STATE 206992

1. SUMMARY. In response to reftel A, post made inquiries to various host government officials and representatives from international organizations to assess the current posture and readiness of the Government of the Republic of Congo (ROC) to respond effectively to an outbreak of avian influenza. Based on these conversations, it appears that the ROC is ill-equipped to respond to an outbreak and probably lacks the resources and public commitment to better prepare without considerable international guidance and support. That said, the ROC has been relatively effective, though highly dependent upon the assistance of the international community, with containing the roughly annual outbreaks of Ebola in the north of the country. END SUMMARY.

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Q and A: Preparedness/Communications  
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2. Preparedness - Besides the recent banning of the import of poultry, the government has no coordinated plan or strategy for preventing avian flu from becoming a pandemic should it come to the ROC. Some small efforts are underway to inform and improve the capacity of the government to respond should a crisis appear. The Ministry of Scientific Research and Technical Innovations, in coordination with the Ministries of Commerce and of Agriculture, Farming and Fisheries, hopes to organize a workshop on avian influenza by the end of November. Mr. Okombo Ngassaki, the Agriculture General Director at the Ministry of Agriculture, recently attended a workshop in Rwanda that sought to define a common African strategy for combating avian flu and hopes to bring insight from that experience to the workshop in Brazzaville.

3. Communications - In post's view, the government is likely to be frank about any outbreak that might occur for the pragmatic reason that if they were not, ROC would not receive the assistance they would need from the international community. The point of contact in the government is the Minister of Agriculture, Farming and Fisheries, Ms. Jeanne Dambenzet.

4. Priorities - While the government is taking some initial, small steps towards better preparedness, avian influenza does not appear to rank very high as a concern. The reason for this is probably a combination of the fact that the problem is not yet knocking at the country's doors as well as the recognition that the ROC lacks the resources (both financial and technical) to be effective on its own to fight any potential outbreak.

5. Legal Frameworks - Besides the ban on poultry imports, post knows of no effort to review national laws for consistency with international health regulations.

6. Partnerships - The government has not actively engaged with the international organizations or other countries on the avian influenza issues. The government has, however, worked effectively with international organizations and other countries to combat other health crises, for example the recent outbreak of Ebola (March/April 2005). The government is likely to be very receptive to assistance from international organizations or the USG, should such assistance be offered.

7. The country does not currently administer annual flu shots, nor does it have the resources to do so. There are no known doses of the annual trivalent flu vaccine in country, let alone any infrastructure for developing or producing the same.

8. Except for what they hear on the TV or radio news, the population is not well informed about the avian flu threat. Arguably, there are mixed reactions among the people. Some are frightened, while others believe that it is only a problem in Asia. Still others believe that it is the same illness routinely seen among their poultry flocks and believe it poses no threat to humans. On the other hand, the people appear receptive to sensitization campaigns

(e.g., Ebola) by the government and international organizations.

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Q and A: Surveillance/Detection  
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¶9. The ROC lacks the basic equipment, specialized laboratories, and specialists themselves to conduct research related to avian flu or to report properly on the scope of any outbreaks. Normally, the government relies on international organizations such as the WHO and UNDP for assistance in bringing in equipment or specialists or for getting samples to laboratories abroad for diagnosis.

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Q and A: Response/Containment  
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¶10. As mentioned above (see paragraph 7), the ROC does not have stockpiles of medication nor is there any indication that the country plans to order any. The same would hold true for protective gear.

¶11. There are not yet plans for culling or vaccinating birds should an outbreak occur. The only proactive step the government has taken thus far is the ban on imported poultry.

¶12. In the past, the government has been effective with small-scale quarantines and social distancing measures. In the event of serious need, the military could be called upon to assist.

¶13. Please be advised that the Embassy Brazzaville TDY Office currently has no access to IVG, OpenNet or GAL e-mail. Embassy staff may be contacted via the following personal e-mail accounts or cell phone numbers:

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